

Talbot County Tourism Board
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, May 13, 2020
8:30 a.m.
Via Zoom Teleconference

I. Call to Order

Chairperson Judy Bixler called the meeting to order at 8:32 a.m.

Board Members Present: Judy Bixler, Kelley Cox, Angela Eade, Ian Fleming, Harold Klinger, Laura Price, Mark Salter, Jeff Schneider, Kim Weller, Cassandra Vanhooser

Board Members Absent: Al Silverstein, Ben Simons

Recording Secretary: Candace Harris

Visitors: Jody Hardesty, Margaret McCain, Unidentified Person, Maura Vanderson

II. Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the April meeting were presented. Harold Klinger moved that the minutes be accepted with any necessary corrections. Angela Eade seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

III. Old Business

COVID-19 Response: Ms. Vanhooser reported that she has been hosting two weekly calls for the business community from the Emergency Operations Center that address a variety of issues. During National Travel and Tourism Week, her guests included Liz Fitzsimmons, managing director, Maryland Office of Tourism Development; Marshall Weston; president and CEO of the Maryland Restaurant Association; Amy Rohrer, president and CEO of the Maryland Hotel Motel Lodging Association; and Cailey Locklair, executive director of the Maryland Retailers Association. Each discussed the challenges their industry sector will face as they reopen.

Recent discussions have turned toward recover. Ms. Vanhooser will call on the Tourism Board and Economic Development Commission to give input to the county health officer for reopening guidance.

Kim Weller reported that the St. Michaels commissioners will have a meeting with businesses regarding what they may need to reopen on May 14 at 10 a.m. Ms. Vanhooser asked that each town collect information about business closings and send to her because it is very important toward funding for future initiatives. Talbot County is working with the Upper Shore Workforce Investment Board to assess the impact the pandemic has had on businesses in the county. This important information is being shared with the County Council as well as the workforce investment board.

Talbot County has allocated \$1.2 million of its CARES Act funding for a grant program for small businesses. A committee of EDC and Tourism Board members will be invited to be part of a task force to create this program.

Chesapeake Bay Magazine Special Section: The 2020 Talbot County Travel Guide was supposed to be printed and distributed in the June issue of Chesapeake Bay Magazine. Instead of printing a guide that will likely be obsolete the second it is printed, Talbot County will have a special section inside the June 2020 issue of the magazine. The pretty girl holding a tray of crabs at the Crab Claw in St. Michaels will be the cover. A special section inside will be title 20 for '20. MThe plan is to push this on social media. There has been an increase of people calling and requesting information, and the department has enough guides left to fulfill these requests.

Visitors Center: The Talbot County Visitor Center remains closed to the public. Ms. Vanhooser stated that at this time staffing with volunteers is not a realistic solution as most of volunteers would likely be in the high-risk category. She is working on a plan to reopen to the public.

National Scenic Byway Application: The application for the National Scenic Byway deadline was extended to June 15, 2020. The Talbot County Council submitted a formal letter of support. The Eastern Shore tourism directors, heritage area directors, and the State of Maryland are seeking a National designation, which opens us up for grant opportunities.

Staff Changes: Ms. Vanhooser reported that Kathy Megahan has retired from Economic and Development. She will be working part-time for the Building Maintenance department.

IV. New Business

Destination Marketing in a Pandemic: Ms. Vanhooser reported that she has a weekly call with her marketing team regarding digital advertising. The department has maintained a baseline digital presence, which is a strategy that she will continue for the foreseeable future. The State of Maryland gave the opportunity to extend the marketing

grant, which Talbot County took advantage. Businesses need to shift their marketing plan as well.

Short Term Rentals:

Angela Eade, the Tourism Board representative for short-term rentals, asked that the Board submit a letter asking the County Council to allow short-term rentals and B&Bs to reopen. One of the trends is a shift from short-term to longer-term rentals, which will affect the level of accommodations tax the County collects. Ms. Eade also reported that permit applications are currently not being processed. Ms. Vanhooser said that she spoke with Ms. Verdery, who said Planning and Zoning does not have the technology to hold public meetings. Ms. Price texted Miguel Salinas during the meeting, and he noted that permits are only processed twice a year under the current rules. Ms. Eade made a motion that the Board submit a letter supporting reopening short-term rentals; Mr. Schneider seconded the motion. The motion passed with one board member opposing the motion. Ms. Vanhooser will draft the letter to send to board members for approval.

- V. Representatives from each of the towns reported on news and events taking place in their jurisdictions.
- VI. Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 9:56 am. The next Meeting will be held on June 10 at 8:30 a.m.